

Pulsa: Sound, Light and 7 Young Artists



Some of the young men of the Pulsa group with some of their fellow occupants at Harmony Ranch, Oxford, Conn.

By DAVID L. SHIREY

They are seven young artists, all men between 25 and 30, and they all live together with their wives and girl friends in a big country house called Harmony Ranch in Oxford, Conn., north of New Haven. In the summertime they can be seen, usually shirtless, in shorts and barefoot, puttering about the house, plowing fields, planting gardens, romping with a gigantic Irish wolfhound, cutting wild flowers or welcoming swarms of other young people into their "commune."

Their clapboard house, with a Federal porch, is always alive, both day and night, with animated conversations and even an occasional drinking brawl. From time to time, the house, to neighbors, must seem like a decadent den for lupanarian delights, when they can glimpse flashing strobe lights coming from inside and hear the shouts of youth along with the weird, eldritch sounds of sitars, ectaras, violins, glongs, flutes and the tatapan of drums.

Research Team at Yale

From September through June, their hair still long, the seven young men all commute to a place that overtly bears little resemblance to their country home: Yale University. There, they become a team of research associates at the School of Art and Architecture, teaching seminars, leading discussions on music, art, technology and city planning and, most

importantly, going about what brought them together in the first place, their art. They mysteriously call themselves Pulsa, which sounds like a Buck Rogers name for an interplanetary space ship.

Pulsa as a group prefers to remain anonymous. When one of them talks, he talks for all seven and refers to himself as Pulsa. "Modern society is too complex for one man to understand," they say. "A community of artists working together is the only possible way to meet such complexity."

Whatever its name and policies, Pulsa is, in the words of one of its members, "a group effort to produce an art experience by organizing various sound and light activities in environments." That means that they take changing amplitudes and pitches of sound and translate them into frequencies and brightnesses of light patterns. To do this, they need an environment, usually large, outside or inside, and such complicated instruments and materials as electronic music generators, analog and digital computers and punch-paper tape readers.

One environment they took their gear to was the Public Garden in downtown Boston. In 1968 they placed 55 strobe lights under the water of a four-acre, meandering pond and, around the edge of the pond, above water, placed 55 speakers. Through programed banks of computers, light and sound

flashed and streamed in changing patterns across the water at speeds as high as 300 miles an hour. It looked as if the patterns of darting automobile headlights and traffic noises had been locked into a self-repeating impressionist composition.

"TV films, the complex interplay of urban sounds and lights . . . have involved our culture in new areas of perception. The Boston show," says Pulsa, "makes meaningful and pleasurable these experiences which are constantly present in our daily lives."

They added that this "was the first public art work which was conceived on a scale and system comparable to the scale and system of our cities of today." Their feeling is that public art, and that is their primary interest, "must treat all parameters of the urban and technological environment as potential media for artistic expression."

Pulsa is against museums, those "elitist, patrician, artificial places. They bring together objects and cultures that don't belong together and treat them as grand possessions," they say. Nonetheless, they rigged up a show last year at the Museum of Modern Art.

"Our art's an experience and after it's over, it's over. There's nothing to own," they say.

It is true that most of their works have been created in some public environment. On the Yale golf course, and at the Yale architecture department, they shot light and

sound in programed patterns through their environments, creating worlds unto themselves. "We wanted to create energies which would flow in the environment," says Pulsa.

"Our work is nonassociational, nonreferential," explains Pulsa. "It is a metaphor, but a metaphor of itself, a metaphor of electronic energies. It is a total abstraction, a network of energy, living in its own time and space."

As graduate students in the late nineteen-sixties at Yale, the seven men found out they had similar interests and decided to live together.

Received a Grant

For the last three years they have been surviving on a grant from the Graham Foundation of Chicago. They grow their own organic foods, "not macrobiotics," and sell some of it, and make their own clothes. Living together, they "sometimes are hassled by conflict, but we always have resolution in our conflict," they say.

They have a vision that one day all art will be created in university communities like theirs. They define that kind of community as "many people playing one machine instead of one person playing many machines." Whatever their future, they will continue in their own way to unite science and technology and use the public arena throughout the country for their experiments.



A Pulsa installation for a sound and light "art experience" organized on the golf course at Yale University